

THE US NEW SILK ROUTE TO MANAGE ASIA

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The New Silk Road (NSR) strategy is a key aspect of the United States' plan to promote stability in Central Asia following the departure of American and NATO troops from Afghanistan. The hope is that boosting trade among Afghanistan and its neighbours will build prosperity and promote peace. The American strategy focuses on bolstering north-south trade - linking India and Pakistan via Afghanistan to the formerly Soviet republics of Central Asia. The United States has backed a 'New Silk Road' through Central Asia to boost economic connectivity across India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Whatever be the opportunities that arise from the new Obama doctrine for strengthening Indo-US strategic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, they come wrapped in concerns, anxieties and challenges for India. President Barack Obama's address to the Australian parliament followed by his active and energetic participation in East Asia Summit and Association of South-East Asian Nations meetings in Bali on 18-19 November, 2011, gives a clear and bold message that the United States is gearing for an assertive management of the unfolding strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific region. In spelling out his Asia-Pacific doctrine, President Obama has clearly underlined the continuing leadership role for the US in the region. In this leadership role, the prospects of the US intervention and encroachment cannot be ruled out, though US leadership seems to be cautious of the fact that such moves driven by the habit of unilateralism have not served the US interests best in the past. It also remains to be seen as to what extent, the US role will go in support of its military alliances in the region and the ideological agenda of the doctrine.

The idea of a New Silk Route is a consequent United States' attempt to create an integration structure in Asian region controlled by the White house and veiled by the economy restore assistance in Afghanistan. Several years earlier Washington likewise already made the try to impose the concept of "Large Central Asia". Many political experts suppose the US is going to head the regional projects through the promotion of their initiative but the US government must also gain greater backing for the strategy from China, Pakistan, and Russia—countries that have reasons to support policy outcomes that differ from US preferences.

The results of the Afghanistan conference in Istanbul and Bonn last year show that the White House, despite the expected troops withdrawal, does not intend to weaken its position in this areas, but furthermore seeks to ensure its long term geopolitical supremacy. Experts believe the US is interested in the conditions of the so-called "Managed Crisis" to remain in Asia. This could allow Washington to move some military bases from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on the plausible excuse. At the same time, the responsibility for the situation

in Afghanistan and the expenses for its recovery will be transferred from Western countries to Asian countries because the Central Asian strategy cannot work without adequate resources, whereas Asia presentably has the well functioning site for multilateral co-operation – the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) is primarily centered on its member nations, Central Asian security-related concerns, often describing the main threats it confronts as being terrorism, separatism and extremism. However evidence is growing that its activities in the area of social development of its member states is increasing fast. SCO, proved its effectiveness in the implementation of various programs on the mutually respected basis. In fact, the idea of NSR is focused exclusively on the implementation of economic programs profitable to West. It does not help to settle the Afghan issue. Unlike the SCO programs, NSR does not provide mechanisms to co-operate on vital matters as the fight against Afghan Drug Trafficking. Furthermore, recent Afghanistan events make the possibility of reconciliation in this country in the foreseeable future seems not so optimistic. Even in the case of unlikely Taliban defeat in 2014, it will take decades to overcome all Afghanistan's internal problems piled over the years of conflict. Therefore the prospects to get Afghanistan transformed into the hub for linking the Southern and Central Asia become vague.

The US intention to exclude Iran participation from the regional projects does not meet the Indian national interests. Such more contradicts the concept of Afghanistan integration into the regional space declared by White House. Furthermore sanctions against Iran, imposed by Washington, put the bar for any interaction of third countries with this regional key player as a result; this move threatens the India's energy security highly dependent on Iranian natural sources import.

The concept of the NSR is able to weaken significantly the already gained political positions and reached level of Indian influence in Afghanistan. Proposed measures for its implementation will lead to ability of Washington to use Delhi as sponsors for US-controlled projects and vice versa to inability of India to pursue its own policies. India should not accept the US offered role of an observer and have to continue seeking ways to strengthen its own positions on Afghanistan in co-operation with Russia and the SCO meeting the national interests. Indian Government needs to make the changes to ensure our permanent membership with SCO. As we have to take part in changing the global financial structure so that it will be able to guarantee stability and prosperity in the world and to ensure further progress in India. India can take part in the transformation of the global and regional security and development by establishing relations of equal mutually beneficial partnership with the member countries of SCO. Perhaps, while for different reasons, China and the US may be uncomfortable to see India as a full member, a deeper role in the SCO serves Indian interests and balances the global power scales.

In view of the above, India's response to the US expectations in the Asia-Pacific requires being cautious, careful and issue based. That may not be necessarily damaging to the Indo-US strategic partnership, as the US seldom expects a complete compliance of its strategic priorities by India. The Indo-US strategic partnership has evolved along with their mutual differences on a range of issues including Iran, those related to the Arab Spring, Pakistan and the nuclear liability provisions. It will accordingly continue to evolve even when differences crop up between India and the US on critical and sensitive strategic issues in the Asia-Pacific region.